

(TMI Newsletter - April 12, 2013)

THE MAGIC OF FLIGHT: IN- AND OUT-OF-BODY

It's no coincidence that, generally speaking, those attracted to The Monroe Institute are also fans of flight. From Icarus's wings to airplanes, hang gliders, jet packs, and manned space flight, the human desire to fly free and unencumbered, as during out-of-body adventures, is strong.

You could say that Kermit Weeks, lifelong OBE practitioner, veteran of multiple TMI programs, medal-winning aerobatic pilot, builder and collector of airplanes, and champion of dreaming big is a poster boy for both modes of travel. Add that to his irrepressible can-do attitude and intimate relationship with Guidance, and you've got someone who reaches for the stars and grabs right onto them.

When we heard the story of how Kermit acquired the rare and coveted Howard Hughes Sikorsky S-43, we knew we had to share it with you. There's no better way to do that than through Kermit's own words and images.

From Kermit's Blog, March 24, 2013:

Last November ended a very long quest to acquire a very rare and valuable Sikorsky S-43 that was originally owned by Howard Hughes! Howard purchased it in 1937 to fly around the world in an attempt to set a new record. Unfortunately, CAA approval delays, the onset of WWII, and the arrival of a faster airplane forced him to set the Sikorsky to the side and use a Lockheed 14. In 1938 he beat the existing world record by flying around the world in less than four days (91 hours) and enjoyed a ticker-tape parade through New York City for his efforts!



Howard Hughes' new Sikorsky S-43 at the factory outfitted with long-range tanks!

After the War got underway, he was forced to sell the airplane to the government for the war effort and was in the process of doing so, as soon as he completed some water testing with it for the HK-1 (Spruce Goose) project. Due to a miscalculation in weight and balance, the airplane was involved in a water-landing accident that sent it to the bottom of Lake Meade, killing two and almost killing Howard. He paid to have it salvaged, apparently got the title back, and spent A LOT of money rebuilding it. After the war, he used it to fly many of his starlet girlfriends around. He last flew it in 1952 where it then sat for decades in a Houston hangar under guard.



Recovered S-43 after the landing accident on Lake Meade!

To my knowledge, there are only three S-43's left in the world. Howard's, a Pearl Harbor veteran owned by the Smithsonian, and a static one at the Pima County Air Museum.

I first saw the airplane at the Oshkosh Fly-In in 1994 while demonstrating my four-engine Short Sunderland flying boat. I couldn't help but make a mental note that, one day, I would love to acquire it!

And . . . who wouldn't?



Sikorsky while owned by Ron Van Kregten, who purchased the airplane from the Hughes company.

*Fast-forward from 1994 to 2006 where I was attending the Monroe Institute in Virginia. It was my third of ten programs studying out-of-body experiences and exploring worlds within myself with sound technology. One day I will publish a book of my journey's called **The Journey Never Ends!** (In case you're wondering . . . no, it did not involve any drugs and, for the record . . . I've never done any recreational drugs in my life!) In one exercise, we were briefed to "go meet other people." To my surprise, Howard Hughes showed up and during a short conversation he said he, "knew I was interested in his Sikorsky S-43 and would HELP ME GET IT!"*

The person that had acquired the airplane from the Hughes Company and restored it back to flying condition was Ron Van Kregten, who purchased it in the early 1980's but had since passed away. Several years after my Monroe experience, I made a point to go visit the airplane south of Houston, TX with the pilot and the agent. It was now for sale but the price was waaaaay beyond my ability to afford at the time.

There was a spare wing for the airplane in California that I later went to see. There, I met the executor of the estate, who just happened to be the brother of the widow, who had also since passed. I made a point to tell the executor my grand vision for Fantasy of Flight in the hopes it might help gain some ground in acquiring the plane. I also told him about my experience with Howard Hughes at the Monroe Institute and that, if it was meant to be, he should, "Look for a sign!" I had no idea what form this might come in, if at all, but felt compelled at the time that I

was supposed to mention this. I got the names of the heirs and later sent them autographed copies of my first children's book along with some other information about Fantasy of Flight.



Outboard wing panels for a complete spare S-43 wing in California!

Fast-forward four more years to September 2012. I was invited to Houston for a press conference for the Wings Over Houston Airshow, where I was being honored as the 2012 recipient for the Lloyd P. Nolen Lifetime Achievement Award. I made it a point to reconnect with the agent selling the airplane and we drove down to see it. It had not flown in seven years and needed work. The engines and props had been overhauled but were off the plane. The economy had since tanked and had been in recession for several years.

Another overseas party was in the process of making an offer with the intent of taking the airplane overseas as an investment. Probably for good. None of us wanted to see that and, within a month, I found a way to come up with an offer that made sense for both of us. We cut a deal.

I couldn't believe it. Whether anyone believes that Howard helped me acquire the plane or not . . . one thing was for certain . . . I was now the proud owner of his Sikorsky!



Proud New Owner!

Last January (2013), with several of my aircraft guys in tow, we visited the airplane in Houston with the intent to see what it was going to take to make the aircraft ferriable for a flight back to Florida. After inspecting it for several hours, we realized we were going to spend a lot of time doing repairs, put the airplane at risk flying it home, only to take it apart once we got there to do it right. It didn't make sense. I made the decision to take it apart in Houston and truck it home.

If you're interested, here's a link to a YouTube clip we did of our trip –

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S6Hj_KcE7_M
(See the link to this video in the notes section below)

At this point, the story of the Howard connection could have easily ended. But it didn't . . . and soon got even MORE bizarre. The information to follow, I only recently became aware of.

While out of town on a trip, the executor of the Van Kregten estate happened to be in Florida for a wedding and stopped by to drop off the logbooks. Remember, this was the brother of the widow and the person I told to "look for a sign" if somehow I was meant to end up with the airplane. When he stopped by, one of my aircraft guys showed him around Fantasy of Flight. At the end of his tour he said he wanted to share a story about his involvement with the airplane and what he knew about how the previous owner came to acquire it, which I followed up on and talked to him directly. This is what he told me -

Ron Van Kregten, the owner, was a pilot and an avid car collector. In the late 1970's and into the early 1980's he had a reoccurring dream. In this dream, he said a man, that he thought could have been Howard Hughes, beckoned him to, "Look at this plane!" In another dream, he was told to "Buy it!" Some time later, he was thumbing through a magazine and saw an advertisement for Howard's Sikorsky S-43, which was now for sale by the Hughes company. IT WAS THE SAME PLANE HE HAD BEEN SHOWN IN HIS DREAMS!

He bought it.

Ron and pilot Jess Bootenhoff got the Sikorsky flying with a crew in Houston and at some point flew it to the Watsonville, CA airshow in 1992 and to Oshkosh in 1994. That was one of the years I had my four-engine Short Sunderland Flying Boat there. We tried to arrange to hook up and fly together in the fly-by pattern but, unfortunately, they had an engine problem.

In 2008, I came to visit him (the executor) in California to look at the spare wing and express my interest in acquiring the plane. This would have been about two years after my experience with Howard at the Monroe Institute and my initially visiting the Sikorsky in Houston. He remembered me telling him about my experience at the Monroe Institute with Howard and the comment that he was going to "help me acquire the plane." He also remembered me telling him that, "If it was meant to be, he should look for a sign!" (At this point, I knew nothing about Van Kregten's dreams or the experience of the executor to follow.)

Eventually the executor's sister (Ron's widow) passed away and the cars were sold off. The only thing left was the airplane, which had not been kept up and now needed a lot of work. The executor flew to Houston to come up with a plan of how to dispose of the airplane and settle the estate. At some point, he found himself sitting in the airplane in the Houston hangar wondering what he should do. (He mentioned that he meditated and had also, like me, had previous out-of-body experiences.) In the plane, in a meditative state, with BOTH EYES OPEN, he "reached out" to his dead sister and brother-in-law for some guidance. All of a sudden the airplane began to "glow inside" and there, sitting in front of him in the airplane . . . was his DEAD BROTHER-IN-LAW facing him with a smile . . . AND a tall man wearing a hat facing away . . . that he sensed was HOWARD HUGHES!

He took this as a sign that I WAS TO END UP WITH THE AIRPLANE!



Sikorsky S-43 in flight by Phil McKenna in all her glory!

As a side story, during the executor's tour of Fantasy of Flight, he took some pictures of his visit and downloaded them onto his laptop. He mentioned to me that, during his tour, he noticed "lots of spirits" around the place! Later, when he went to show his friends the pics of Fantasy of Flight on his laptop, they were all "zapped." He remembered they were still on the camera SD card but when he went to check, they were gone as well! During the wedding, he took lots of pictures on the same SD card and later when he went to download them to his laptop, the Fantasy of Flight pictures were both ON HIS LAPTOP AND THE SD CARD!

He told me, "He felt the spirits of Fantasy of Flight had been playing with him by removing and adding back the photos!" It was then that I told him we've known the Fantasy of Flight was crawling with spirits for years and, so much so, we've done over a dozen "Night Flight" Paranormal investigations with the paying public with great results!

He told my employee after his tour that he felt comfortable with his decision to sell the airplane to me and realized that Howard's Sikorsky "ended up where it was meant to be!"

How's that for pretty cool and bizarre?

Welcome to my world!

Kermit—

Bonus photo: Kermit with Franceen King at Fantasy of Flight
From Kermit's Blog of May 14, 2009

